RIBA

CETLD Evaluation Report
RIBApedia The Architectural Research Wiki

Executive Summary

This report evaluates the development of an architectural research wiki, led by the Research & Development department at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and kindly funded by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD).

This report is intended as an honest appraisal of our project successes, challenges, setbacks, and lessons learned. We hope that by sharing our learning process, we can better contribute to the aims of CETLD—including towards a wider understanding of how 'web 2.0' technologies can enhance research, learning, teaching, and connectivity.

This report answers the following questions:

Background

Q1   What was the purpose of the project?
Q2   What were the project aims and objectives?
Q3   What was the context to the project?

What happened?

Q4   Describe the development process of the project
Q5   What was the evaluation process?
Q6   What lessons did you learn?
Q7   How did the project support the aims of CETLD as outlined in the original proposal?

Future steps

Q8   How are you disseminating results of the project to the wider audience?
Q9   What are your next steps?

Author: **Clare Sinclair, Knowledge Management Projects Officer**

Contributors: Anna Gagliano, Knowledge and Research Manager
                 Keith Snook, Director of Research and Technical

Research & Development department, Royal Institute of British Architects

RIBA

Background

Q1 What was the purpose of the project?

The purpose of the project was to *make stronger connections across the architectural research community*. We proposed to achieve this though developing a collaborative web-based resource (using wiki technology1), which was free to join and open to individual and institutional contributions:

> a 'community space' where people can deposit and share research, thoughts, ideas, articles, and is peer-reviewed and maintained because everyone in the community can read and edit content (Project Proposal Form)

Q2 What were the project aims and objectives?

The project aimed to:

- Improve knowledge of academic practices by exploring the potential for online information exchange and collaboration

- Improve the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the practice of design

- Provide experience in harvesting information—and lessons learned through our research process

- Enhance peer group learning through virtual collaborations, including: greater web-based study information for undergraduate students and useful research and teaching resources for academics and researchers

- Creating a virtual community shaping a knowledge-sharing environment

- Centralise resources by collating links to web-based collections and information

- Create partnerships for learning and research between scholarly institutions to benefit students and scholars

- Establish a learning continuum—ultimately to improve the take-up of postgraduate studies. We hoped to showcase inspirational research projects, and highlight topics for new research.

Our key objectives were to:

- Undertake initial research into the appropriate degree of openness/control over user-generated content

---

1 Wikis are a collection of editable web pages

- Develop a prototype wiki 'proof of concept'

- Develop a structure for the wiki by creating basic organising principles enabling ease of navigation through the pages

- Lay the foundation for building the wiki community and nominate champions within the RIBA and schools of architecture

- Keep content topical to meet community needs and encourage sustained wider usage

Q3 What was the context to the project?

The wider context to the project can be broadly identified as 'web 2.0 collaborative tools' and 'professional':

'Web 2.0' collaborative tools

Wikis have been in use since the mid-90's and were popularised by the creation of 'Wikipedia' the online encyclopaedia in 2001. Significantly, the 'wiki' was not patented—this technology has become open to usage and modification by anyone. Wikis don't require technical skills to edit, and importantly, they can be edited by many users simultaneously—arguably enabling mass web-based collaboration. There are many types of software and hosting options available (some free, some not), and many potential uses.

Professional

The Research & Development department's mission at the RIBA is *capturing, sharing and applying professional knowledge in architecture and the build environment*. Our department's projects have responded to a recognised need to support the ongoing knowledge and information needs of architects.

More specifically, we identified a gap in the market—a lack of connection between theory and practice:

(From our interim 'Making Connections' report by Consilian)

RIBA

What happened?

Q4 Describe the development process and explain any differences from original intentions, timetable, budget

The development of our project is presented in three stages:

Stage 1 'Proof of concept'

The 'prototype' wiki was created in 2006, prior to achieving CETLD support for the project, and was intended to test out some of our ideas about the viability of a wiki concept. We set up a free hosted wiki using the 'Wetpaint' site, contributed some relevant content, and began engaging with a small group of 60-85 registered participants from the academic research community.

Project development was originally due to start in January 2007, but was just beginning in Apr 2007—we feel that this delay was largely due to a lack of available internal IT-related support (as the IT department had difficulties relating to resources and staffing). We intended to establish a steering group and an executive group—this was not sustained and was arguably a top-heavy approach.

Key developments following CETLD's engagement included:

- Commissioning an interim report entitled 'Making Connections' which detailed the requirements or 'patterns' for building a viable architectural research community.

- One new full-time staff member joined the Research and Development department and this project as a Knowledge Management Projects Officer, in March 2008.

- Incremental changes in 2008 included new content and improved navigation. We engaged a Student Writer for one week to add further content.

Stage 2 'Laying the foundations'

- We selected the 'open-source' software 'Mediawiki' to replace Wetpaint (we were unhappy with advertised content on the site, and some limitations of the software)
- Rebranded as the more memorable 'RIBApedia'
    - Purchased the domain name www.ribapedia.com
    - Initiated internal discussions with other departments relating to branding/creating a logo for the wiki
- Sourced external IT consultants to host, install, migrate data and customise Mediawiki
- Liaised with solicitors to draft a legal framework (relating to copyright, terms of use, data protection)
- Sourced a designer to create marketing material (printed leaflets and an interactive PDF to upload to USB sticks) to circulate to schools of architecture and practitioners

RIBA ⚜

Stage 3 'RIBApedia'

- We soft-launched RIBApedia on 15th August 2008 with a staff workshop and discussion chaired by Jos Boys (from CETLD), and circulated a press release
- Wrote several articles for newsletters targeting different audiences, including for the RIBA student newsletter, RIBA practice e-newsletter, and CETLD newsletter
- Provided live wiki coverage of the RIBA Research Symposium 2008 'Space at Home'
- Added the Google analytics tool to better monitor site usage

Q5.   What was the evaluation process?

We proposed that the success of our project could be measured by the following:

- Growth of site activity and user registrations ('exit statistics' were taken prior to closing the 'proof of concept' Wetpaint wiki in April 08; ongoing usage statistics are provided for RIBApedia using Google Analytics – please see appendices)

- Feedback and comments—including initial press and weblog coverage of the RIBApedia launch, informal feedback at the RIBApedia launch workshop, and discussion with some of our members via RIBAnet

- Interim report entitled 'Making Connections' by consultancy 'Consilian'. The report included a straw poll of 26 employees (including 13 RIBA members) in an architectural firm. This identified:

  - A lack of awareness of the wiki and thus a need for greater publicity: 'everybody agreed that the current website needed a higher profile in order to be widely adopted by practitioners, specifically that the RIBA as a whole needed to give the initiative greater impetus and publicity'
  - The need to increase user-driven content—the viability of the wiki is 'dependent upon the ability of the RIBA to attract large numbers of users to the wiki'.
  - 'Connections between the academic community and practitioners should match the type of content being transmitted'.
  - 'The resource is not unique'

Q6.   What lessons did you learn?

Successes and setbacks

'the techniques needed to build a successful wiki are ultimately more a 'black art' than a science' (Tapscott & Williams, Wikinomics)

Setbacks

- The 'proof of concept' pilot platform (using Wetpaint) did not test the key determinate of wiki success—the development of user-driven content—as it

was not actively marketed and user activity was fairly low. However, it did make us aware of several issues:

- Advertising on the wiki (which was provided by Wetpaint) illustrates the pros and cons such as a lack of control when using hosted free software
- Limitations of Wetpaint software, for example, page navigation was difficult due to the way pages were listed
- Lack of legal guidance – copyright licensing for content was automatically covered by Wetpaint. This made data migration more complex. We found that the data protection issues are a grey area in user-driven sites.
- Timescales
  - Delays caused by internal problems – lack of internal IT support due (initially) to understaffing, conflicting priorities, and internal lack of expertise (later on) to host and support Mediawiki. More widely, perhaps we underestimated the complexities and timescales required for an(y) IT-based project, for example, the decisions involved in choosing software, consultants, and hosting arrangements.
  - Delays affected timings of the launch (unfortunately in the summer holidays) – the original project deadline was Jan 2008.
- As a 'super brand', it is uncharted territory for the RIBA to provide user-driven and moderated (rather than controlled) sites. We found that there is some incompatibility between a corporate approach to communication, and the more open environment of 'web 2.0' driven tools.
- The Steering Group was not active during the course of the project (perhaps through a lack of incentive)

Successes

- Proactive marketing, re-branding and a 'launch' led to greater awareness of the wiki
- A significant increase in user membership and activity. Evidence of this includes positive feedback, user-generated content – on Wetpaint we had a total of 85 users (average of 4 registrations per month) from August 06 – April 08 (total of 20 months). We now have over 300 members of RIBApedia – and members seem more active
- Improved software, navigation, branding and marketing all came about through learning from the initial 'proof of concept' wiki
- The learning process gave us a really good basis for using other web 2.0 tools in RIBA projects and an improved understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in such projects

RIBA 🏛

Research outcomes

To some extent, the wiki is in a very early stage of development—it does take time to build up the critical mass required to have a self-sufficient, community-driven resource. However, to date, we have positively engaged with a number of different stakeholders involved in teaching and learning in the academic community:

Benefits

- Architectural practices have been adding content to the site, as well as students (writing about topics of interest and their societies), and academics (adding research summaries, and relevant events)

- The wider architectural community (such as architects with blogs about topics of interest) have also added links to sites of interest

- Statistics show (see appendices) that there is a more international interest in the site than we anticipated

- Positive press and blogger reactions to the site show that there is a genuine interest in tools such as wikis, and that the RIBA can benefit from responding to members' information needs by adopting new technologies and taking calculated risks

Q7   How did the project support the aims of CETLD (as outlined in the original proposal)?

The RIBA now offers a collaborative tool that takes into account the different needs and interest of members of the architectural research community—from students and researchers, to academics and practices engaged in research. There is still a discernable need to bridge the gap between research and practice, but we have made a start in creating new connections, and have learnt valuable lessons along the way.

Dissemination

Q8   How are you disseminating results of project to wider audience?

We are happy for the evaluation report to be posted on the CETLD website. We maintain that the project has provided an excellent base for other web 2.0 projects within RIBA, including: RIBA Knowledge Communities and the Creative Industries Technology and Innovation Network (CITIN). We continue to reflect and share our experiences on this project through presentations at RIBA.

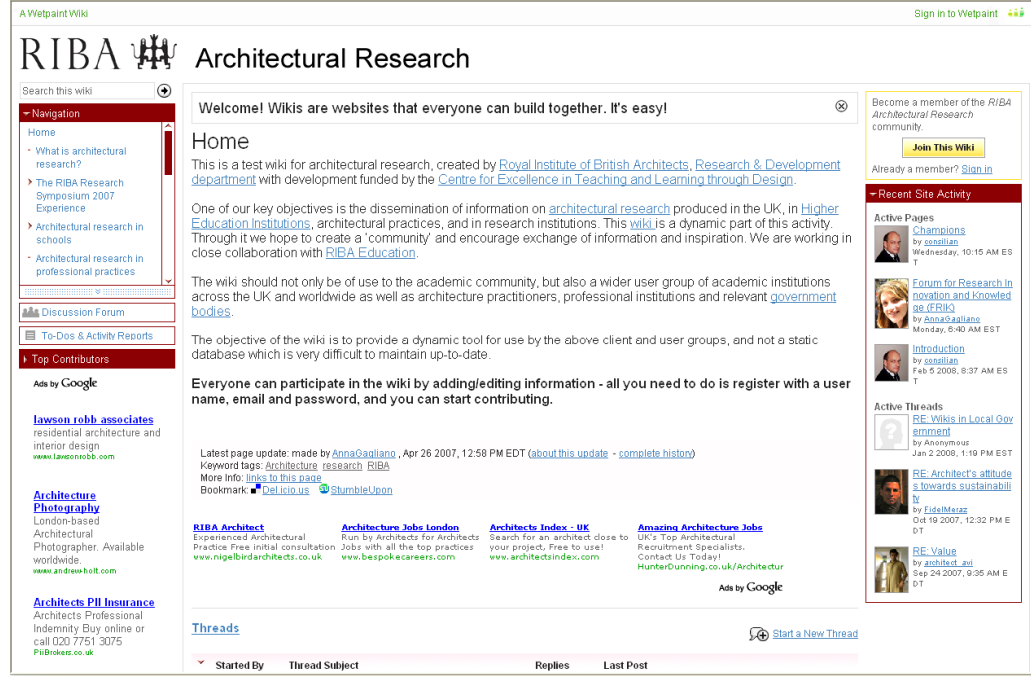**Q9   What are your next steps?**

We plan to develop the wiki beyond the lifespan of the CELTD funding, resources permitting:

- Direct marketing to schools of architecture throughout the new academic year, in collaboration with the RIBA Education Department

- Improving the design of the site
- Continuing to support the growth of the community through providing support and timely feedback
- Engaging more moderators or developing 'champion' roles

RIBA

Appendices

Homepage of the 'proof of concept' wiki on Wetpaint

A Wetpaint Wiki

Sign in to Wetpaint

RIBA Architectural Research

Search this wiki

Navigation

Home
- What is architectural research?
- The RIBA Research Symposium 2007 Experience
- Architectural research in schools
- Architectural research in professional practices

Discussion Forum

To-Dos & Activity Reports

Top Contributors

Ads by Google

lawson robb associates
residential architecture and interior design
www.lawsonrobb.com

Architecture Photography
London-based Architectural Photographer. Available worldwide.
www.andrew-holt.com

Architects PII Insurance
Architects Professional Indemnity Buy online or call 020 7751 3075
PIIBrokers.co.uk

Welcome! Wikis are websites that everyone can build together. It's easy!

Home

This is a test wiki for architectural research, created by Royal Institute of British Architects, Research & Development department with development funded by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design.

One of our key objectives is the dissemination of information on architectural research produced in the UK, in Higher Education Institutions, architectural practices, and in research institutions. This wiki is a dynamic part of this activity. Through it we hope to create a 'community' and encourage exchange of information and inspiration. We are working in close collaboration with RIBA Education.

The wiki should not only be of use to the academic community, but also a wider user group of academic institutions across the UK and worldwide as well as architecture practitioners, professional institutions and relevant government bodies.

The objective of the wiki is to provide a dynamic tool for use by the above client and user groups, and not a static database which is very difficult to maintain up-to-date.

Everyone can participate in the wiki by adding/editing information - all you need to do is register with a user name, email and password, and you can start contributing.

Latest page update: made by AnnaGagliano, Apr 26 2007, 12:58 PM EDT (about this update - complete history)
Keyword tags: Architecture research RIBA
More Info: links to this page
Bookmark: Del.icio.us StumbleUpon

RIBA Architect
Experienced Architectural Practice Free initial consultation
www.nigelbirdarchitects.co.uk

Architecture Jobs London
Run by Architects for Architects Jobs with all the top practices
www.bespokecareers.com

Architects Index - UK
Search for an architect close to your project, Free to use!
www.architectsindex.com

Amazing Architecture Jobs
UK's Top Architectural Recruitment Specialists. Contact Us Today!
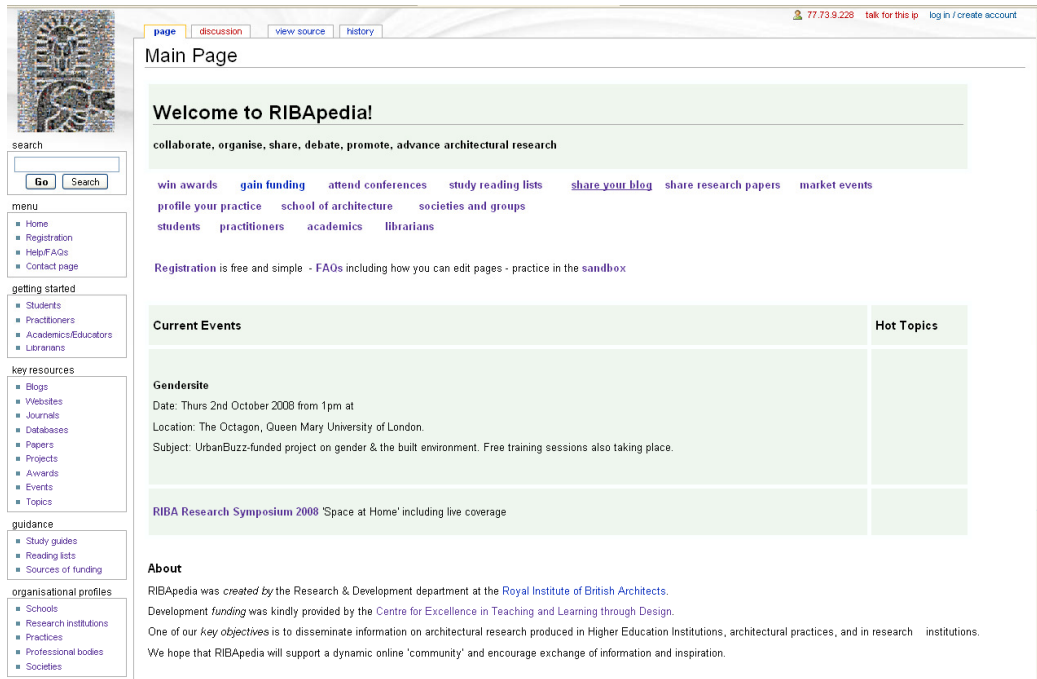HunterDunning.co.uk/Architectur

Ads by Google

Threads

Start a New Thread

Started By   Thread Subject   Replies   Last Post

Become a member of the RIBA Architectural Research community.

Join This Wiki

Already a member? Sign in

Recent Site Activity

Active Pages
Champions
by consilian
Wednesday, 10:15 AM EST

Forum for Research Innovation and Knowledge (FRIK)
by AnnaGagliano
Monday, 8:40 AM EST

Introduction
by consilian
Feb 5 2008, 8:37 AM EST

Active Threads
RE: Wikis in Local Government
by Anonymous
Jan 2 2008, 1:19 PM EST

RE: Architect's attitudes towards sustainability
by FidelMeraz
Oct 19 2007, 12:32 PM EDT

RE: Value
by architect_avi
Sep 24 2007, 9:35 AM EDT

Homepage of RIBApedia (Oct 2008)

77.73.9.228   talk for this ip   log in / create account

page   discussion   view source   history

Main Page

Welcome to RIBApedia!

collaborate, organise, share, debate, promote, advance architectural research

win awards   gain funding   attend conferences   study reading lists   share your blog   share research papers   market events

profile your practice   school of architecture   societies and groups

students   practitioners   academics   librarians

Registration is free and simple - FAQs including how you can edit pages - practice in the sandbox

search

Go   Search

menu
- Home
- Registration
- Help/FAQs
- Contact page

getting started
- Students
- Practitioners
- Academics/Educators
- Librarians

key resources
- Blogs
- Websites
- Journals
- Databases
- Papers
- Projects
- Awards
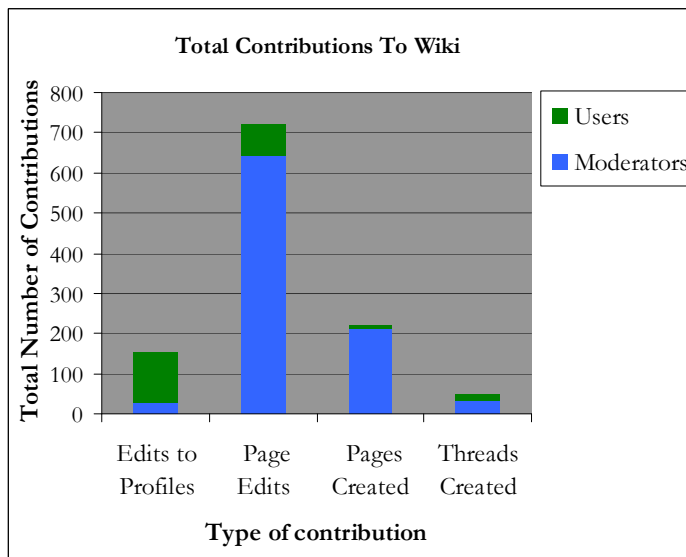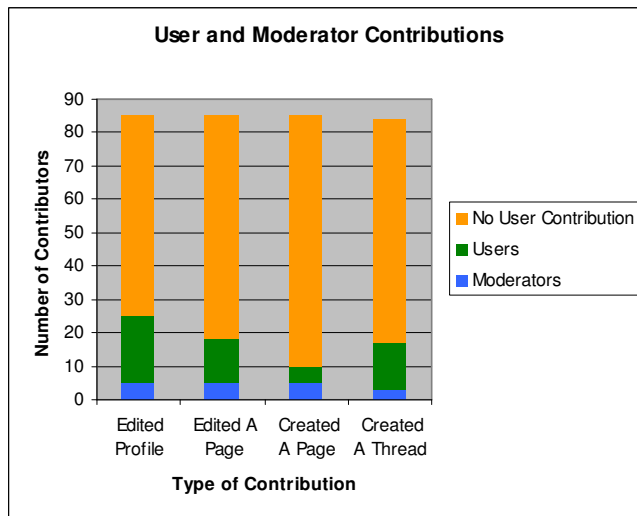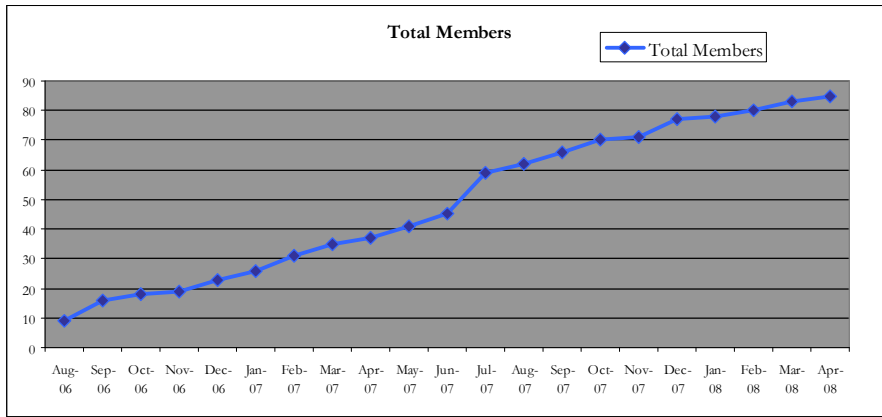- Events
- Topics

guidance
- Study guides
- Reading lists
- Sources of funding

organisational profiles
- Schools
- Research institutions
- Practices
- Professional bodies
- Societies

Current Events   **Hot Topics**

Gendersite

Date: Thurs 2nd October 2008 from 1pm at

Location: The Octagon, Queen Mary University of London.

Subject: UrbanBuzz-funded project on gender & the built environment. Free training sessions also taking place.

RIBA Research Symposium 2008 'Space at Home' including live coverage

About

RIBApedia was created by the Research & Development department at the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Development funding was kindly provided by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design.

One of our key objectives is to disseminate information on architectural research produced in Higher Education Institutions, architectural practices, and in research institutions.

We hope that RIBApedia will support a dynamic online 'community' and encourage exchange of information and inspiration.

RIBA

Wetpaint Exit Statistics Aug 06 – Apr 08

User Registrations

Total Members

User and Moderator Contributions

Total Contributions To Wiki

RIBA

Press coverage following the launch on 15th August 2008

relationships with the places they inhabit, and with each other"

RIBA's wiki shaping up to be wicked

The RIBA will today (Friday) launch its very own wiki. It's a brave and ambitious move by the 174-year-old institution. The granddaddy of wikis, www.wikipedia.com, has in seven years become one of the world's largest reference websites. It gets 684 million visitors a year, and hosts 10 million articles in more than 250 languages.

The RIBA has its work cut out to stake a claim as a leading forum for architectural reference online. It has been slow off the mark — architectural reference sites are popping up all over the web.

But it would be foolish not to grab the initiative now. The RIBA's great advantage is its international reach and reputation, and it has a significant and exciting role to play in sharing knowledge across the globe.

Only this year it scrapped the £10 entrance fee to the British Architectural Library, and its programme to digitise drawings and photographs in its world-class collection continues apace. The educational potential is vast.

Users of www.ribapedia.com will be able to upload or download research papers, information about schools, courses, and bursaries, or find links to blogs, journals or databases. With so much flotsam and jetsam out there, it's easy to forget that this is just what the internet was made for.

> **Building Design, 15 August 2008**
> p2 editorial

Friday, August 15, 2008

RIBApedia - wiki for architects

The Royal Institute of British Architects or RIBA launched an architecture based research wiki today specializing in Journals, Online databases, Awards for architectural research, Funding, Conferences, Projects and Reading lists.

They call it RIBApedia

While the internet is a useful research tool the democratization of of public information banks, such as through Wikipedia, and the plethora of personal subjective websites (such as this one) make culling reliable information from the internet somewhat tricky. Not that print media is inherently more reliable, however there seems to be a more thorough vetting process for information as well as a more permanent record of topics that are discussed and opinions that are stated.

Now that RIBA is moving forward into the realm of information archiving and dissemination through a public "wiki" platform I hope that the RIBApedia can become a reliable and researched centralized location for gathering data. While this may eventually require quite a bit of work on RIBA's part as more and more "articles" are created, there is some level of responsibility assumed when one makes the claim that they hope to "become the online bible on study guidance, funding guidance on research and worldwide scholarships, and links to journals and professional societies." The Architect's Journal

Which is a good thing. A professional body taking the step to create a usable public domain of knowledge about the profession. I am very excited to witness RIBApedia grow and evolve into a reliable and usable reference material.

For you students though, don't forget your school's architecture/design library. There is a tremendous source right at your fingertips, usually full of materials that your professors have personally selected as being pertinent to the projects that you will be undertaking while in your specific curriculum.

> **Blog post - TOI Studio**,
> Dru McKeown